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## An Algorithm

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## AN ALGORITHM

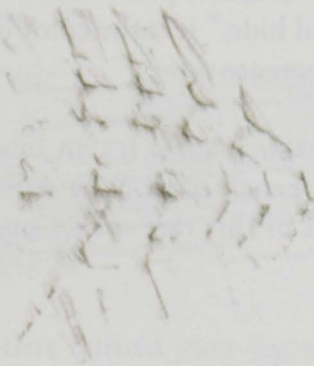
**Incompleteness Theorem:** *For any formal effectively generated theory  $T$  including basic arithmetical truths and also certain truths about formal provability,  $T$  includes a statement of its own consistency if and only if  $T$  is inconsistent. (Godel)*

### Axiom:

In 1925, Max Ernst, artist and radical anti-war activist, was inspired by an ancient wooden floor where the grain of the planks had been accentuated by many years of scrubbing. The patterns of the graining suggested strange images to him. He captured these by laying sheets of paper on the floor and then rubbing over them with a soft pencil. The results suggest mysterious forests peopled with bird-like creatures... These drawings were published in a 1926 collection titled *Histoire Naturelle*.

- Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art other than Works by British Artists*, Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London 1981

### Axiom:



[My brother's boot]

**Proof:**

If this is your boot, then your hand touched this piece of paper.

If your hand touched the paper, then you made this rubbing.

If you made the rubbing, then your hand might still grip,  
your arm might still move.

If your hand grips and your arm moves, then you are alive.

You said you need odd and secret tasks to complete so that you can remember who you are. I sent you a stack of paper and two pencils and a magazine-collaged letter like a ransom note. I also sent you leaves and pine needles from up on the mountain. When the package was in the mail, I thought *damn* it I should have sent a book or something baked or a song we used to sing transcribed for the harmonica.

When I get the rubbings back from you, Afghan soil crumbles out of the envelope and into my hand. It's a lot like the caliche of Tucson, but grayer. The back side of the boot rubbing is streaked with it, as if you'd made the image by grinding your toe into the paper over a graphite plane.

This boot is made for desert combat. I've seen it before, when it was first issued to you, when you were home. I know that it is a light tan color. Camel, you called it. I know the canvas top is thinner that you had expected, but you said, "It will make it easier to run, to squat down and hide." It is the color of soil somewhere, but not there, not where you are now.

But *this*, of course, is not a boot. It's an image of a boot, a series of thin marks where a pencil came close to the sole of your boot. I think it's the closeness of this that makes me feel alone in a way I did not expect.

**Infinite Regress:** One of three parts to a theory that purports the impossibility to prove any truth logically or mathematically. An Infinite Regress arises if the truth of proposition P1 requires the support of proposition P2, the truth of proposition P2 requires the support of proposition P3, ... , and the truth of proposition Pn-1 requires the support of proposition Pn and n approaches infinity. (Albert)

**Axiom:**

Psychometry is viewed as one's ability to sense or read an object or another person merely by looking, holding or touching. It is a form of scrying, forecasting or predicting the future. The psychometric can hold a letter or a piece of jewelry and tell about the history of the object or the person who owned it - all from what was recorded into the object in the form of emanations [sic].

I do not ask for belief before experience, so much as for the open mind and patient attention of my readers: that some faith is required in all departments of science is admitted, but all I ask now is a hearing for my suggestions, and that my statements may be put to the test of experiment, before they are rejected or accepted.

- James Coates, Ph.D, M.D., *Seeing the Invisible*, 1906

**Axiom:**



[the part of a truck that burned your leg while you were asleep]



**Proof:**

If you were asleep while your skin burned, then I imagine you must have been dreaming.

If you were dreaming, then there are parts of you that are not always in that place.

If there are parts of you not always in that place, then those parts can be kept safe.

If those parts are kept safe, you will come home whole.

You said, "Email is easy, but I like getting things in the mail. I like thinking about how the paper is coming from far away and that someone actually touched it."

I am driving through the desert in New Mexico, passing canals and reservoirs that are the color of the land around them. They stand apart only in their luminosity. The water they hold is separated from the thirsty land by little lips of dust.

You are also in a desert. It is one I cannot imagine, though I've held bits of it in my hand. Its soil is smeared here on this paper, too, along with rust and what looks like transfer from a muddy green paint.

During the 1980s, Gregor Schneider rarely left his home in Rheydt, Germany. He spent his time multiplying the structure of the house inside of itself: wall in front of wall, ceiling below ceiling, floor on floor, room in room. Since 1985, the house has been open so that visitors can explore it, entering in between newly constructed sections and the original walls. Those who have seen it describe windows in front of solid walls, narrow passageways, and contorted routes between rooms. They report seeing clothes, trash, letters, family portraits and redundant plumbing smashed between the layers of the house. Artist Ulrich Loock has said of the house, "The repetition of the already existent produces the unknown, not in the foreground, but in the background of the added-on work."

Schneider says, "The only way now to know what has been added is to measure the hidden spaces...No one can get to the original structure anymore without systematically destroying the house." And I wonder if any part of him wishes to burn it down. Maybe not the entire house, but one layer of it – the eighth wall, but not the ninth, not the tenth. Going back in time to take away or implant events that then can not be undone.

This is my theory: you joined the Army because of Germany. Because when we were young, Germany was the only distant place you had known anyone in our family to live. Our uncle was in the Army. He was stationed in Mainz with our aunt. You were in pre-school when we learned that our cousin was born there. This was the 80s, and they lived on an Army base fewer than eighty miles away from where Schneider was building rooms inside of rooms.

You became fascinated with Germany. You took German in high school. You showed me a picture of the Eastern Alps in a book in the library and said, "Someday I'll be there." You showed me where they were on a map; across the ocean, past France, far away.

*Law of Excluded Middle: Of two contradictory propositions, one must be true, the other false:  $P \vee \neg P$ . (Aristotle)*

#### **Axiom:**

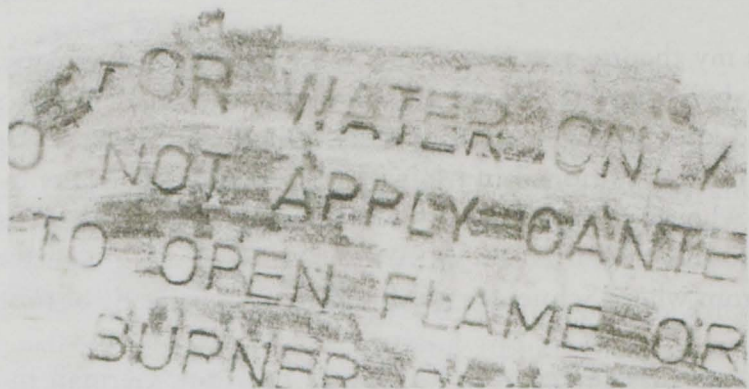
Transference occurs when the patient begins to see another person (the analyst) as the return, the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype.

— Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, 1940

Theories on transference should include a consideration of objects as well as people; objects including spoken words, written symbols, models and diagrams, arithmetic procedures, and structures.

— Van den Brink, *Transference of Objects*, 1987

**Axiom:**



[Army issue canteen]

**Proof:**

If you have made these images, then you might remember that this was a game we used to play.

If you remember the game, then you might know that birch bark always makes the best pattern.

If you know the pattern of birch bark, then when you close your eyes, you might still see birch leaves falling to the ground like gold coins.

If you can see the leaves, then it's possible that you can smell them, too, and you are home.

Traveling east, there are seven countries, an ocean, and a sea between us. There are mountain ranges: the Rockies, the Smokies, the Atlas, the Aqaba, and the Zagros. And major rivers: the Mississippi, the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Helmand. There are more than twelve thousand miles.



What else can be quantified about this distance? There are a finite number of farms from here to there. There are a certain number of tire swings, decent swimming holes, dismantled bridges. We could count the number of daughters who live between here and there, the number of brothers, their homes, silos, grains of sand, sea urchins, sharks, waves, trees, dunes, mirages, guns.

Between your first and second deployments, you broke down on my couch. I was home between fights, too. Just strikes though, organizing campaigns. We set up a crib for your baby daughter in the living room. She was finally sleeping through the night. Our plan was to hike in the mountains around Tucson, to relax in the backyard, to drink a lot of beer, to sleep. I was careful not to ask you too much. Excusing myself of the fear of having to know by telling myself that you wouldn't want to say. I put on *The Cure* because we used to listen to them on the way to school. You smiled first, and then suddenly you were sobbing. Your huge shoulders shook in my arms until your nose started to bleed. Then you got up quickly, wiped your face, and it was over.

Between your second and third deployments, we talked on Sundays. You had a routine; you called when you had just returned from a walk with your daughters, after you had worked in the yard, after your family had eaten a lunch of half sandwiches and carrots, after you had cut your hair.

You used to have a blond streak in your hair on the back of your head, and we teased you about it - that you were going gray at seven, at nine, at fourteen. But with your hair clipped so close to your head, the streak has become invisible. What has become visible in its place is the dent on the crown of your head. When you were nine, you did a backflip off the side of the Pemberville public pool. You landed on the cement instead of in the water. Your blood billowed out into the blue like a thunderhead.



**Predicate Calculus:** An axiomated form of predicate logic in which formulas contain variables which can be quantified. Two common quantifiers are the existential  $\exists$  ("there exists") and universal  $\forall$  ("for all") quantifiers. (Boole)

**Axiom:**

I remember the rush of seeing the bellies of war planes fly across the theater screen. The newsreels during WWII did nothing if not train the young to be excited by fatal situations.

- N. Scott Momaday, *The Names: A Memoir*, 1976

**Axiom:**



[bullet]

**Proof:**

If you are enamored by the tools of war, then you have lost hold of my brother.

If you are not my brother, then this remembering means nothing.

If remembering means nothing, then we are unmoored, adrift.

If we have come loose in this way, then there is already no way back.

or (proof as prayer)

If you made the image of this bullet, then the bullet is distinct from your hand.

If it is not your hand, then the boot is not your foot.

If the boot is not your foot, then your body is still somehow separate from at least these implements of war.

If your body is still separate, then it's possible that the war itself has not seeped through your skin.

Our father says that he remembers the newsreels that played in town during the Korean war. He remembers boys running around the yard at school with their arms outstretched as though they were flying planes. He remembers the sound of pretend gunfire. He says that he prayed he would never have to go to war.

But twelve years later, he got out of bed in the middle of the night. He went into his younger sisters' room and quietly looted their drawers, stuffing the small change each of them had managed to save into a sock. He walked out the back door, got into his car, and drove away.

He left because he had to. Or this is what he says.

He was still seventeen when he arrived in San Diego, so he lied on the application. Three weeks later, in April of 1961, he was on a Navy ship off the coast of Cuba.

I liked shooting guns more than you did. You were shy about the suddenness of sound and never quite ready for the kickback. You would even pass the BB gun back to me without taking a turn. I liked the loud popping sound the BBs made in the chamber. I liked how it felt to hold my breath before pulling the trigger.

You left because you had to. Or this is what you say. Your hands then were rough and calloused from too many years of working with brick and mortar. I picture you holding a beer in your left hand and the phone receiver in your right the last time we talked before you enlisted. You wanted to go back to school but didn't have the money. Your voice cracked and then you got quiet. I knew what it was that you weren't saying. A week later, you called from boot camp, your voice already hoarse. Already too quick to respond to my questions. Already changed.